



RUSSIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

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WHY RUSSIA DOES THINGS
THE WAY IT DOES

LECTURE BY
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Foreword

Finnish Intelligence Officer Explains the Russian Mindset

Jon Gabriel, editor

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Russia has always befuddled Western analysts, a fact best summed up by Winston Churchill who said the multi-continental colossus is “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” More recently, “experts” wondered why Putin was pushing forces to Ukraine’s border, then why he launched such a massive attack, and now why on earth he’s reducing cities to rubble and pushing civilians into mass graves.

Studying Russian history and culture over the past few years has given me inklings into the “Russian mind” but I’ve only scratched the surface. Thankfully, Martti J. Kari has far more insight. Kari is a former Finnish intelligence colonel and currently teaches cybersecurity at the University of Jyväskylä. (Oh, how I love Finnish names.)

In today’s “I support the current thing” social-media hot-take factory, attempting to understand one’s adversaries is equated to sympathizing with them. They won’t learn much from Professor Kari because they’re unteachable. But if you know your military history, you can be assured that Finns are not sentimental about the Bear on their border. (Full disclosure: As a Finnish American, I share this skepticism.)

I ran across a lecture Kari gave in 2018 which is the best analysis I’ve found on Russia’s attitude toward geopolitics. Unfortunately, it is in Finnish, and the English version is performed by a text-to-talk robot, making it tough going. So I’ve gathered the best bits from his hour-long talk into a readable format. It is quite long but well worth the read.

As we wonder how best to end the nightmare in Ukraine and prevent Putin from moving further west, understanding his mindset is the first step. Please

note that I have slightly edited the transcript for clarity and brevity. All content belongs to Kari and any translation errors belong to me and Google. (Visit his video links and give him several likes!) Take it away, Martti...

Background

My background is that I have served in military intelligence for most of my career. I am an officer and an intelligence colonel who retired last fall. I started here in January at the university as a teacher. I teach intelligence. As I have spent most of my career in intelligence, Russia and the Soviet Union have always been my point of interest.

As a young lieutenant, I was sent to what was then Leningrad to study the Russian language. Even then I started to wonder why the Russians were doing things differently than we do? Why do they see the world differently than we see it? Since then, I have worked with the Russians and with the Soviets until my retirement. I've been to the Soviet Union and to Russia a lot during my career and have been in a lot of contact with them.

When I started writing my Ph.D. here at the university, I discovered the theory of strategic culture. That theory opened up how to rationalize and think about why Russians do things differently than we do. This strategic culture is a way (to analyze). It was created in the United States during the '70s when the Americans lost the Vietnam War. They began to wonder how a superpower like the United States could lose to Vietnam, which Americans considered a very underdeveloped country. They realized that not everything is a plus and a minus, that is, a zero-sum game. There are other factors behind it that affect the people and how the people operate together.

The Americans developed a theory of strategic culture capable of explaining a country. In this case, how does Russian leadership see a crisis? How does it see the use of force in a crisis? How does it see the role of a crisis and the use of force in foreign policy? How does it see the enemy? How does it see a threat? And then how does it envision the possible strategic options by which it might respond to a threat? This theory of strategic culture explains it.

The theory of strategic culture is based on trying to outline what factors influence the decision-making of the state leadership. It then looks at how things are reflected in government decision-making and how they are reflected in practical action. This is a pretty good way to explain the actions of a state, in this case, Russia. On why Russia has acted as it has. This will help us understand.

When I say understand, I do not mean that we have to approve of what Russia is doing. But it helps us understand why Russia does things differently. It may even give us the instruments to predict what may happen next. Churchill said that “Russia is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” It is true. This is well said. Let us now set out to dispel this riddle through the theory of strategic culture.

There Is Not One Russia

Before we start with that, we must remember that we do not have one Russia. We kind of have many layers of Russia. Different historical layers still influence the thinking of the Russians about how the Russians work today. If we start from that very first movement, that is, Slavic Russia. Language and entity and Russianness were born there. Also the belief that all Slavic people, as it were, are one was created there. And the Russian people, the largest of the Slavic peoples, have the duty of keeping them all in check and protecting them.

When we go further in history. With the fall of Constantinople, the traditions of Eastern Rome were transferred to Moscow. Moscow uses the term “Third and Eternal Rome” for itself. The Russians are, as it were, followers of the Eastern Roman tradition. Religion, conservatism, and the relationship to authority came from there. It means that one does not challenge authority. Authority is obtained from God. He who leads us has received authority from God to lead us. He is infallible. Authority will not be challenged under any circumstances. This idea comes from Byzantine Russia.

The third era that influenced Russian thought in a great manner is Mongol Russia. In the 1200s, the Mongols conquered Russia. They held Russia for

years. That time was cruel. There are a lot of words in Russian, related to torture, taxation, and corruption that come from the Mongol language. Dominance under personal authority was rooted in the administrative culture of the Mongols. That is, there is only one khan that leads. It is he who leads, no one else. Others are passive followers. That one guy leads and takes responsibility and the initiative. When the belief of divine legitimacy to lead is attached to this, the leader will appear fairly tough in their worldview.

The corruption and cruelty also come from the Mongol era. During Mongol rule, the only ways to survive were lying, corruption, and violence. This still lives very deep in Russia's strategic culture. When Mongol rule ended, the Mongols did not just pack their bags and disappear from Russia. Instead, they mixed with the locals. So the traditions also stayed with the people. In particular, to the leading caste. The Mongols who had previously ruled the country merged into the ruling layers, which is still visible today. When looking at genetic inheritance, they are pretty dark; dark eyes, for example. There are not many blondes in Russia.

Then came this era of turmoil. Although it was a short period of time, it had great importance to the Russians. Because then both external and internal enemies roared. The Poles who conquered Moscow and Russia did not have a strong leader. Romanov was then elected Tsar and the Russians realized that a strong leader was better than chaos.

In addition to all this, the authority comes from God and the autocrat is indeed a leader. It was stated there that only sovereignty will save Russia. It has been several hundred years in their genetic inheritance that autocracy is the only right solution. That is, autocracy is better than chaos and mayhem.

Then we came to European Russia. Peter the Great founded the city of St. Petersburg in the early 18th century on the Finnish swamp of the Neva estuary. After that, the Russians began to clash whether they were in the West or in the East. The Westernizers (Západniki) favored the West and the Slavophiles favored the East. This struggle is still going on.

Russia began to rise into a great power. As Russia modernized, they also started to mystify themselves. That is, Russia itself began to mystify itself

through authors for example. They kind of built a smokescreen between us and them, consciously mystifying Russia.

Then came the great power of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. The power politics and the sphere of influence of Russia come from the Cold War era. World War II taught them that it is better to fight not in their own territory but on the territories of others. The Soviet Union lost more than 27 million people during World War II.

Authoritarian rule has followed Russian rule since the Mongol era. It hasn't changed since then. The name of the leader has changed but authoritarian rule itself has always remained the same. Russia sees itself as the heir to the Soviet Union, as it is in some respects.

So these are the six layers of Russia.

There are 11 time zones in Russia. These huge distances also affect Russia. From the Polish border to Moscow, through to the Urals, is a plateau that is easy to attack with both horses and tanks. That is what has been done. Napoleon attacked, the Germans attacked, and so on. That idea is also in the genetic inheritance of the Russians, that someone is always attacking. "We will be conquered." They have no shelter, no mountains, no rivers. There are no lakes between the east and the capital. Geographically, Russia has always been easy to conquer, which also influences their thinking.

Russianness: Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Narodnost.

Belief in Russianness is important. Russianness consists of three things: it is orthodoxy, autocracy, and narodnost. There is no Finnish translation for narodnost, but it means the people or things related to the ordinary people. Let's open that point more.

But first, the autocracy. They have always been an autocracy since Mongolian times. Either it has been a Khan, or it has been a Tsar. Or it has been a communist party usually personified by Stalin or Khrushchev or someone. Or now, by the president. Russia has a strong autocracy. They

also want autocracy because they are used to it. A good leader keeps confusion away. They think this way and are used to it.

Conservatives have held power in Russia for years. There were a few radical reformers. Peter the Great, his reforms were mostly successful. The reforms of these other gentlemen were mostly not successful. Someone can, of course, consider Lenin's accomplishments as a success, or Gorbachev's. But the Russians themselves see that Gorbachev disintegrated the Soviet Union. Nor was Yeltsin a super reformer. In other words, the Conservatives have always held power.

The Russians believe in a just Tsar. Once the Tsar has taken authority from God, he cannot make mistakes. The Tsar is infallible. He has princes who gradually become infallible near the Tsar. Some prince becomes a Tsar in due course. The infallible Tsar who is always right. The mistakes are happening here with the boyars.

The Importance of Boyars

Between the people and the infallible Tsar, there are boyars. Boyars, which at different times are from a slightly different social class. Boyars as an institution were born as early as the 10th century. Their position in the hierarchy came after the princes. We have a Tsar who is infallible, princes who grow into a tsar, and some of whom become infallible when they become Tsars.

Then there are the people. In between the prince and the people are the boyars, who usually make the right decisions for the wise Tsar, but sometimes they are wrong. If an error occurs somewhere, it is the boyars who have made that error. The Tsar, the President, or the Secretary-General of the Central Committee is always infallible. The fault is found in the boyars.

After a period of turmoil, the boyars completely lost their power over the Tsar and their property as well. That was during an era of turmoil, and ownership changed. Previously, boyars had ownership, but it turned into tenure. That is, the Tsar took everything away and gave tenure to boyars. "You get to control this state, or you get to control these slaves. You get to

control this merchant ship,” and so on. But tenure can be taken away if you misbehave. If the Tsar is not satisfied, the possession will be taken away from you. That is, ownership became tenure.

During the Soviet era, tenure continued instead of ownership. That is, in the Soviet Union when you reached a certain position of power, you had tenure. You got to visit a dacha and Yalta and you had a servant who was looking out for you. However, you did not own these, but you had possession, a tenure of these.

Another point is that, when you reach a certain position, you are entitled to a certain amount of corruption. That is, a certain degree of power gives you the right to a certain degree of corruption, too. At a lower rank, you didn't get to steal that much. The higher you get, the more you get to steal.

It had rules and those rules had to be followed. They weren't written rules, of course, but everyone knew these rules of the game. This same system is currently in Russia. The nomenklatura tells who is on what scale compared to everyone else and how much corruption he is allowed to take. These business oligarchs also belong to this group.

The rules are as follows: you must not steal from the wrong guy, and you're not allowed to steal more than your position allows you to.

Last summer, Putin was on live television and took some of the boyars with him. These were the governors of different regions in Russia. A man called Putin and said, for example, “In our area, this road network is in poor condition.” Putin turned to the governor of the area and asked, “why are the roads are in poor condition? Fix them.” The governor replied, “Yes, Mr. President.” The caller said, “Thank you, Mr. President, for taking care of this.” So, the boyar procedure still works, even on live television.

If you reach a certain position, then you will get a certain share of corruption. Neither too much nor from the wrong guy. One person who stole too much is Mikhail Khodorkovsky. After spending years in prison, he now lives in Switzerland. Alexey Ulyukayev stole from the wrong person, Igor Sechin, who is close to Putin and probably the second most influential person in Russia. Ulyukayev spent years in prison. If you follow the rules,

everything will go well; if you don't follow the rules, you suffer. This is how it works.

Then there is religion. Religion is important because it unites people together. At Putin's inauguration, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia stood in the most prominent position. Kirill also belongs to the boyars and his job is to foster faith in people. His message is, "Even though it goes a little bad now, when we get to heaven, it will go really well there." That is his job in the system.

After being a member of the Communist Party and a KGB officer, Putin is now considered the number one believer. How situations change.

Here's one story about Kirill. He was photographed with a very expensive watch on his wrist. When this became public, the Russians tried to cover it up by editing the image but forgot to edit the clock reflection off the table surface. In this way, the boyars are sometimes caught.

Then there is the third component, namely the people, narodnost. After the French Revolution, there was a lot of talk about the people, what kind of role people in the community have, and so on. In Russia, they defined a unique version of the people.

The Tsar knew better than the people themselves what was good for the people. The Tsar is infallible. When a leader has received power from God, he knows best what's good for the people. During the Soviet era, this continued in the same way. The roofs of apartment buildings had signs saying "the party and the people are one," although they were certainly not the same. This is still evident in Russia.

Suffering as a Virtue and Two Realities

The Russians have the ability to expect and endure a tremendous amount of suffering. This is an amazing trait for them. They are able to anticipate and endure suffering. They have made suffering a virtue. When you suffer on behalf of the Soviet Union or Russia, things turn out really nice when all that is over; when you die or when you reach communism. "There are no

refrigerators and no real food, but when we get to communism then there will be everything.”

The Russians have a miraculous ability to endure suffering. On the other hand, they also have a wonderful way of forming two realities. They formed a Soviet public reality and a kitchen-table reality. Around the kitchen table, things were really being discussed. I had a chat at the kitchen table in the 1980s, which was extremely interesting. Perestroika was about to start just then. It was interesting because a Russian is like two different people when they are outside compared to how they act around the kitchen table.

These two different realities are still operating in Russia. In 1836, Mikhail Glinka composed the opera “A Life for the Tsar,” in which a peasant sacrifices himself for the Tsar. He needed to save the Tsar to wage war against the Poles. The sacrificer, a peasant, belongs to the narodnost. Russia recently issued a stamp from this opera. People are still told that it’s their job to sacrifice themselves for the Tsar. “Do not forget your role as a people.”

During the Soviet era, the Homo Sovieticus was created. They initially believed that the Soviet system could create a better person, but had to change it to another meaning: careless, does not care about common property, passively accepts everything given by the director, avoids individual responsibility, and so on. Whoever has been in Russia and in the Soviet Union could wonder for themselves whether these traits resemble reality or not.

When the Soviet Union began to collapse, Yuri Levada, who later founded the Levada Research Center, estimated that Homo Sovieticus was on the brink of extinction. Most Russian respondents said that the break-up of the Soviet Union was more bad than good. In the ’90s, the word democracy began to resemble the same as chaos in Russian minds. That is, only a strong leader will save us from chaos. Then, in the late ’90s, Homo Sovieticus was, after all, alive and waiting for a strong leader.

Here are some sayings of Tsar Nicholas I, but it could be Vladimir the First, who is currently in power.

“Autocracy, orthodoxy and ‘Russkiy mir’ [the Russian world] must be assembled under the protection of the wings of the Russian double eagle”

“Russia’s sacred mission is to act as a messenger of a higher civilization.”

“A little warfare in the border areas is needed to maintain a patriotic spirit.”

This was said in the 18th century but it could have been said today. Nothing has changed.

Managed Information

A vast percentage of Russians get all their information from television. These television channels are under the control of Putin and his close associates. Therefore, Russians receive filtered information. They do not get the facts from the media. In Russia, the values and norms are already strong and the information that is constantly being fed is different from our western point of view. Therefore, it is quite certain that the goals and actions of Russians will not be the same as how we would perform in the same situations.

This difference must be remembered. More and more young people receive information from the internet because they know other languages and follow information from the web. But the older population still receives information through television. The narrative that is told on Russian television is that Russia is a besieged fort. “NATO is besieging Russia.” “Russia is at constant war with NATO. The enemy is at the gates.” Between Norway and Russia, there are a few kilometers bordering NATO. Then there is the border with the Baltic states, which is really the NATO and Russian border. But the picture shown to Russians is that America surrounds Russians both from air and from space.

The only task for and within the state leadership is to stay in power. They are not much interested in the life of an ordinary Russian. With this in mind, they stay in power by telling how the “enemy is at the gates, we are at war.” “Only an autocrat like me can keep this country safe.” “A weak leader means chaos.” “The enemy is at the gates and inside.” According to the

narrative, the West is feeding the opposition. When the opposition raises its head, it is said to be in a conspiracy with the West against Russia and must be responded to accordingly.

So many Russians receive this information, that Boris Nemtsov and Alexei Navalny were western agents. The Russians believe this story quite a lot, at least they pretend to. I don't know how they're talking about it at the kitchen table. This is the story told by the Russian media under their leaders. "Russia is a besieged fort that is at constant war with the West and the enemy is inside." Putin said, "Russia never lost the Cold War because it never ended." That's how they talk there. He also said how "The Collapse of the USSR was the geopolitical tragedy of the century." When he says so, he also really thinks and means it himself.

The Neurosis of the Kremlin

When George Kennan was the US ambassador to Moscow after World War II, he began to see how the Soviet Union would not necessarily be an ally for the United States now that Nazi Germany had been defeated. He wrote a long description of how Soviet policy was changing. He wrote, "The Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is based on their traditional and instinctive insecurity." The Russians have a feeling of insecurity about "someone always attacking us."

You remember the steppes up to the Urals, easy to attack with horses or with tanks or whatever. That's how they were attacked. Napoleon attacked. The Mongols conquered most of present-day Russia. Hitler attacked and got really far into the Soviet Union. Finns and Swedes have also been to Russia. Jacob De la Gardie was in Moscow for one winter before leaving. Then why did we have a winter war in 1939? Finland had a winter war because the Russians did not think we could defend our own territory. The Russians imagined the bustle coming in the direction of St. Petersburg/Leningrad.

Now evil NATO is going to attack Russia. This is the story. "Evil NATO is now in Ukraine and attacking rebel areas." The story is based on a neurotic sense of insecurity. This is another thing Kennan wrote: "Russia is deaf to the logic of reason but very sensitive to the logic of power." Lenin once said

“Try it with a bayonet, if it’s soft, push. If it’s hard, leave.” In other words, if we treat Russia in the Sea of Azov and in Crimea and in eastern Ukraine as before, by only resenting without doing anything else, there will always be more stitches coming from Russia.

But they are sensitive to the logic of power. If there is a tough opponent against them, they leave. Kennan said it back in the ’40s. When a bear looks into the pond, it sees itself. Power is what works with Russia. The Russians are imperialists as are the Americans. But American imperialism is based on the fact that they want to have resources, oil, or whatever. On the other hand, Russian imperialism is based on fear.

To compare, the cause and starting point of Russian imperialism are quite different. Russian imperialism is based on someone potentially attacking them again. They sought to solve this problem by forming the Warsaw Pact, from which they got a buffer between the enemy and themselves. Now that the Warsaw Pact has been dissolved, the Russians are building the buffer a little differently now.

With Russian air defense systems, they are building a buffer zone in the air now. From the Kola Peninsula, the Karelian Isthmus, Kaliningrad, Crimea to Syria. They are taking not only air but also information. The Russians do it by pushing their own influence to the information environment.

Information Geopolitics

The Russians use terms like information geopolitics. Information geopolitics means that when we cannot move on land, we are advancing in the air with anti-aircraft systems and also in the information space. Russians are also seeking more protection from the information space between them and the enemy. Roughly speaking, they have both clumsy and skillful information influence. We may not realize skillful influencing as influencing at all. With clumsy influencing, the goal is to draw our attention away.

Johan Bäckman (an activist working for the Russian government), for example, is involved in clumsy information influencing. When Johan

Bäckman speaks for Russia, we notice “Hey, he’s speaking for Russia.” We’re pleased with ourselves for seeing this influence on information. But, in fact, Bäckman’s job (and that of people like him in Russia) is to draw our attention away as a diversion in order for the skillful information to take place somewhere else more effectively.

We have former prime ministers on the boards of Russian banks. We have former prime ministers in charge of gas pipelines. We have a hockey team that plays in the KHL [Russian-based hockey league] and so on. Maybe the real information influence of Russia is happening somewhere out there while we watch Johan Bäckman, thinking, “hey we notice this.”

The Russians are good at this. They founded the Cheka, predecessor of the KGB, an information office whose mission was to influence the mind and politics of the press specifically through influential agents. It was the same in the KGB; Putin has attended KGB school. This information influence is likely to continue by Russia. Lenin talked about useful idiots who may not realize they are serving the interests of Russia or the Soviet Union at any time. They think they’re doing something good; peace movements for example. They did not realize how they were actually used. They thought they were doing something good but ended up being largely part of Russia’s information geopolitics.

Russia, the Savior of Europe

The Russians have a wonderful belief in how they have to save Europe. In some sense, they are right, they have. They think that they must save Europe and unite the Slavic peoples. In history, they have saved Europe from Napoleon. Really, they beat Napoleon. They saved Europe from Hitler’s fascism. Right now, I remember when I was on a business trip to Russia in the 2000s. I asked the Russian officers, “What are you doing fighting in Chechnya?” According to them, the Russians were there to defend Europe against Islam, when Europeans themselves do not realize how great a threat Islam is and how much Russia is doing for Europe to prevent its spread.

They really believe their mission is to defend, protect, and save Europe. They may not know against what, but in any case, they will always save us. Even if we don't want them to. Tolstoy supported that doctrine, as did Alexander Dugin, who is considered the geopolitical brain in the Kremlin. He pushed and is pushing hard for the view that Russia would save everyone, even if not asked.

The Power of History

Russians see the world through history. I was talking about the conquest of the Poles and the time of the turmoil. There is a famous statue of a merchant named Kuzma Minin reunited with Prince Dmitry. It again shows the people and the prince joining forces to defeat the Poles in Moscow. Minin and Dmitri are immortalized in Red Square so that the Russians never forget when the people and the prince join forces, Russia is unbeatable. This is remembered in military parades annually; troops march past these statues.

This is a reminder of how Russians think of everything through history and power. When Molotov told Stalin that the Russians should establish relations with the Vatican during World War II, Stalin asked "How many divisions does the Pope have?" Molotov said, "well, none at all," to which Stalin replied, "forget it." The Russians did not realize how one Polish Pope behind the Iron Curtain would be able to break the whole system. When there was a Polish Pope, if it was a CIA operation, it was an extremely well-planned operation. If it was just a coincidence, it was a pretty good coincidence, at least in my opinion.

Here's how Russians see us Finns. Alexander Pushkin is a national poet in Russia. "The Bronze Horseman" is the first poem that the little girls with braids and the little boys memorize at school in Russia. This is the first poem they memorize in school and tells the story of the founding of the city of St. Petersburg. Read this and see what image these little girls and boys get of Finns:

*On banks of mosses and wet grass/ Black huts were dotted there by chance/
The miserable Finn's abode; The wood unknown to the rays/ Of the dull
sun, by clouds stowed, Hummed all around./ And he thought so:*

And what kind of people are Swedes according to the poem?

*'The Swede from here will be frightened; Here a great city will be wrought/
To spite our neighborhood conceited.*

The original version is much sharper: "The Finn, a miserable stepchild of nature." In Finland, if someone were to teach similar things about Russians the teacher would probably get fired right away.

Always Behind in Technology

Russia is technologically backward and has always been. Someone said that the Russian has invented nothing but a samovar and, even there, the faucet was stolen from the Germans. I don't know if the story is true but that's the saying. Ilja Repin's painting "Barge Haulers on the Volga" shows Russia's backwardness.



As peasants manually drag a barge, in the background is a steamship from Germany. In other words, German ships began to operate on the Volga, not Russian ships. When these people pulled the ferry upstream, there was already new hope in the background, but it wasn't Russian hope, it was German imported goods.

If you think about it, Peter the Great learned to build ships in Holland. The Russians themselves tried to build computers soon thought, “No, we don’t have the capacity to do that, we have to copy IBM.” The war in Afghanistan made procurement a little more difficult, but they still got IBM equipment through cover companies, including Japan. They dismantled the equipment upon receiving them, made similar parts, copied them, and then re-assembled them.

When Stalin realized the United States was developing nuclear weapons, the Soviet intelligence service’s most over-the-top intelligence priority was everything related to nuclear weapons. “Get it here.” The Russians got the atom bomb a few years later. The Soviet Union stole nuclear weapons data from the United States.

That still happens today. Russia does not have the capacity to develop artificial intelligence. The Chinese have it, the Russians do not. Putin has said, “Whoever masters artificial intelligence, he will become the ruler of the whole world.” It is certain that right now one of the most important tasks of intelligence services is to acquire everything related to artificial intelligence.

What Is Truth?

The Russian idea of truth is interesting. After all, language tells how people think, how they perceive the world, and how society thinks. The United States has two words for positive rights: “liberty” and “freedom.” Russia has two words for truth and three words for lie. This is certainly not a coincidence.

There’s the word “pravda,” which is truth but not absolute truth. Rather, the kind of truth that gets rid of awkward or bad situations. It’s like tactical truth. “Istina” is the opposite of a lie. Istina is true, as true as can be. But pravda is rather... sometimes it can be true, at other times not so true.

There are three words for lie. “Vranyo” is a white lie but on the strategic level. It is also kind of a way to get rid of nasty situations. The Russians know it, but we don’t realize it. We think that there are only truth and lies in the world. It’s just black and white. But the lie in Russia was born under

Mongol rule; violence and lying were the way to survive. This tradition has been in their system ever since.

Russia has the word “krugovaya poruka,” or gang guarantee. It means that when we have some set of people with a common goal. Be it the Kremlin leadership or the Russian armed forces or whatever. We have a common goal so I step out of the circle and lie to an outsider. My gang hears that I lie but they don’t judge me as a liar because they understand that I am using tactical truth (vranjo) to achieve the greater goals of our gang. The use of tactical truth, or a lie, is accepted if it is done for the benefit of the in-group. Just like you can steal when you don’t steal too much or from the wrong guy. You also get to lie if you lie for the sake of the gang.

It’s a form of doublethink, as Orwell showed in 1984. At the kitchen table, different things are said than outside the home. Everyone understands that Bob speaks very differently around the kitchen table than he does in public. Everyone understands why he does so. The in-group creates their own story. For example, “We had nothing to do with the poisoning of Skripal.” Or that “We have nothing to do with the shooting down of the Malaysian plane.” This is based on the fact that we in the West, under the rule of law, when we make an argument we need to be able to unequivocally prove our claim to be true. But when Russia makes an argument, there are always small gaps left here and there. We Westerners start to think about it, “Is that really so?”

The notion of lie and truth works differently in Russia. For example, in 1939, Russia installed a puppet government in Finland. They pushed the narrative that the working population of Finland was tired of Marshall Gustaf Mannerheim’s “fascist junta” even though it was the rightful government of Finland. When Russian troops invaded Finland, they noticed it wasn’t so. We don’t realize the use of Russian tactical truth.

When they went to Crimea, Putin said, “They are not Russian forces.” If our commander-in-chief of the Finnish Defence Forces were to deny that a Finnish soldier was a Finnish soldier, that would lead to unfortunate situations. The soldier would go on a strike or get depressed or something. But the Russians were proud that the president was able to use tactical truth. Putin said, “They are not Russian forces.” We started thinking here in the west, “Well, who are they then? Where did they come from?” This gave

Russia the two or three days needed to take over Crimea completely. Then Putin remembered, “Oh, they were Russian troops after all.”

Or the shooting down of a Malaysian plane. It has been proven unequivocally that the missile that shot that plane down was from a Russian Air Defense Brigade. The wildest stories that were moving in Russia were that, when the situation was at its hottest, the people were already dead there on the plane. This story was spread. Those people who died in the accident did not die in the attack but they were already dead (before the missile struck). But no one questioned it because the Russians knew it was a tactical truth. They did not question how the captain agreed to fly a plane full of dead people, about to be shot down. No one questioned it because they knew it was a tactical truth.

Or, in the Donbass region, brave miners fought the “fascist junta” in Kiev. However, some so-called civilian protesters had apparently forgotten to remove their Russian Armed Forces tags. Or “We have nothing to do with the hacking of the DNC, the US Democratic Party.” In fact, they got caught, both the GRU, the Russian military intelligence service, and the FSB, the civilian intelligence, were both caught on the servers. Or that “We don’t have anything to do with the poisoning of Skripal.” Except that there was a Russian intelligence colonel who had received the Hero of the Russian Federation honorary medal from Putin. There was also a doctor present who was tasked with making sure Chepiga, who was performing the poisoning operation on Skripal would not be exposed to the poison himself.

The funniest thing here is that Chepiga’s grandmother, who lives near Arkhangelsk, in her foolishness had published a picture of Chepiga receiving the medal from Putin himself. You’ll never guess what happened to Grandma after that? Grandma disappeared.

We need to understand that the use of Russian truth and falsehood is completely different from our thinking. If they say something, they won’t necessarily mean it but the tactical truth is meant as an instrument to slip through a slightly open doorway to get out of a nasty situation.

Will Putin Fall?

What could destabilize Russia? The middle class? Internal conflict in the system? Activation of the opposition? Some threats have been eliminated already. Change in the energy sector? Whatever would happen to Russia, they have such good reserves that they don't worry. Nationalism is not a problem when it is channeled. Chechnya has been treated, there Kadyrov pulls the strings at the moment. The global recession is not really a problem for Russia since they are in a recession all the time anyway.

But these are the ones that could make a difference. This is what the Russians fear: a time of turmoil. Like before Romanov was elected leader. This is their horror, a time of turmoil. The Russians also use the '90s as a time of turmoil. When there's a weak leader, the country is in turmoil. That is, even if it hurts a little, they prefer a strong leader because, under a strong leader, chaos is absent.

Viktor Zolotov is a lathe operator by profession but he's one of Putin's judo friends. Putin fears internal unrest, so he elevated Zolotov as a boyar. He's now the Commander of the National Guard, a three-star general. I have been in military school for six years and I retired at the rank of Colonel. But Putin trusts his judo buddy. Putin cannot rely on the armed forces so he empowered the National Guard to protect him. They are allowed to use violence to quell internal unrest. They are allowed to fire at protesters, but they are not allowed to fire at pregnant women because the law is "humane."

Zolotov is high on the scale of the boyars, so is entitled to high levels of corruption. He has a pretty large amount of assets. Navalny hates this corruption and challenged Zolotov to a televised debate. Zolotov replied, "I'll challenge you to a duel, in a ring or on a judo mat, I'll make you minced meat." In the western world, would a high-ranking police commander say to make minced meat out of someone, how long would he stay in office? But this kind of discourse is business as usual in Russia.

The More Russia Changes...

If we look at how Russia has developed. Tsarist Russia had an authoritarian system of leadership. The Tsar had received his power from God and was

infallible. Corruption was intense, opposition was persecuted, and Westerners were portrayed as a threat. Autocracy, Russia had a messianic mission, they sought regional expansion and believed in Russianness. Then the power of the Tsars collapsed and the Soviet Union was established. There was an authoritarian system of leadership, there was corruption, there was opposition persecution, the West was described as a threat, there was a sham democracy they had a messianic mission, their mission was to spread communism to Cuba, Angola, and so on.

Although the Soviet Union was the home of many different peoples, the Russian part was still the leading class. Then came the time of turmoil. Everything went a little bad. Power was decentralized, and the regions gained a lot of power. Corruption did not disappear. Russia had freedom of speech in the '90s. They even thought about NATO membership. The West was no longer a threat. There was an era of democracy that turned "democracy" into a curse word and an ugly word in the minds of the Russian people because they were financially on their knees. Identity was lost. They were trying to save the remnants of their empire through wars in Chechnya and so on. Western culture began to push itself into Russia.

But then, thankfully in the Russian mind, along came a strong leader who saved everything. Putin's Russia is an authoritarian system of leadership, corruption, persecution of the opposition, the West is described as a threat, a guided democracy, Russia has a messianic mission, regional enlargement efforts, and a belief in Russianness.

If we look at when Russia was liberated from the Mongols to the present day, it is all the same. If you think Russia will change, you can think so, but I don't agree. Levada surveyed Russians about the most significant people in world history. Most chose Stalin, even though millions were executed or died in his camps. The majority said Putin is the toughest man in world history. An increasing number of Russians know nothing of Stalin's purges.

There is suicidal terrorism in Russia. German Nazis killed Jews and others, but Russians killed Russians. Families and clans were mixed up so there were victims and executions in every family and house. This matter was not settled in Russia, as it was in Germany. People are told, "The Nazis were evil and the Jews were victims and this can not happen again." There has

never been such dealing with the subject in Russia because they were so messed up. There was a shooter and a victim from the same nuclear family. There was a shooter and a victim from the same extended family.

They have never dealt with what really happened. That's why they still consider Stalin a tough guy, and that's pretty worrying.

Worship of a Past That Never Was

They want to go back to that kind of imaginary past. There was no such thing as the imaginary past they want to go back to but they think there was. Stalin's glorification, longing back for the Tsarist Empire, and so on. Then there is the desire to correct the historical injustices experienced by Russia. Let's face it: all nations have experienced injustices. We Finns lost Karelia. But we don't shout for it anymore. We were beaten and so be it.

But the Russians are digging for the injustices and seeking redress for any reason. The Russians took back Crimea because it was just a correction of historical injustice. They have a longing for a Soviet Union that never existed in reality. The more time goes on, the finer the times become in people's minds and heads. Then there is this democracy, which is a time of turmoil.

Today's Russian student has lived under Putin's rule all his life. He has heard all his life on television that "the west threatens us," "We are a besieged fort and we are at war," and so on. This is very challenging.

What Will Happen to Russia?

The period of stagnation will continue until Putin leaves. Or there will be a harsher period, Stalin's time part two. Another purge. Development stops and repression begins, the Iron Curtain. Or the whole system will collapse as it did in 1991. Or Russia democratizes, which I personally don't believe. Or it polarizes with Westernizers and Slavophiles, the west and the east will begin to struggle with each other again.

I talked earlier about princes. Today we have a tsar who is infallible and he will eventually retire, probably. A new tsar will be elected to replace him. The prince must be a tough guy. He needs to be able to guarantee a peaceful rest of the life for the retiring tsar. Just as Putin guaranteed Yeltsin's life, so that Yeltsin could live in peace from all legal action until he died.

In exactly the same way, Putin is now looking for such a prince. Medvedev is too soft. He can't do it. There are two candidates. One is Alexey Djumin. The Russian princely story requires that the prince is a hero. Before he becomes the infallible tsar he must be the hero. He is somehow heroic. Djumin is heroic, he has been awarded the title of Russian hero. He rescued Yanukovych from the clutches of fascists in Kiev. That is, he led the Yanukovych rescue operation from there when, according to the story, the fascists came to power in Kiev. He earned the title of Russian hero.

He was a major general and Deputy Minister of Defense. He has earned the hero's cloak, and he is safe in Tula. He has been castled. (Russian chess gamers like to castle.) Djumin has been castled there to the Tula area to wait. It is close to Moscow. In an area where nothing should go wrong, i.e., the hero will no longer do anything wrong before Putin goes. And he waits there, learning administration in a good Tula district.

The second candidate, Yevgeny Zinitsev, is currently Minister of Emergency Situations. The Minister of Emergency Situations is always the one who saves the Russians whether it is a flood or whatever. That is, he will also receive the title of Russian hero. He will save the Russians at some point before rising to power. He has a pretty hard track record when we look at where he has worked in the past: KGB, FSB, FSO, a man of the system. He has been very close to Putin.

These two candidates look similar to each other, funnily enough. The only difference is that Djumin plays as a goalkeeper for the hockey team against Putin. Djumin is a good goalkeeper except when Putin shoots, then it usually goes all the way to the goal. He also knows this boyar game quite well.

According to research, Putin's support is beginning to decline. There is talk that Putin is responsible for the problems of Russia where the armed forces

are not so important. More important is the well-being of the people. Yes, little bubbles are bubbling under the surface.

Alright, I will end the presentation here.

Russian Strategic Culture